

Frequently Asked Questions about Violence Against Women

Is violence against women all that common?

Violence against women is, unfortunately, common in America. Consider the following facts from national surveys:

- One out of four American women report having been raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, live-in partner, or date at some time in their life.
- About 1 million women are stalked each year in the U.S.
- While men are more likely to be victims of violent crime, women are between 5 to 8 times more likely to be victimized by an intimate partner.
- An estimated 4 million American women are physically abused by their spouses or live-in partners each year.
- Another estimated 1.9 million American women are physically assaulted each year.
- One out of every six American women has experienced some form of sexual assault or abuse during her lifetime. Of these women, 76% of them over the age of 18 report that they have been raped by someone they know.

What are the types of violence against women?

Violence against women can take several forms including domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault and abuse, rape, incest, dating violence, and elder abuse. Violence includes both actual and threatened violent acts—physical, psychological, or sexual—against women. Battered women is a term used to describe women involved and usually living with physically and/or psychologically abusive spouses or partners. Dating violence includes the use of "date rape" drugs such as Rohypnol, a drug that sedates and immobilizes a person, as well as impairs memory of a violent event. Elder abuse from individuals caring or living with an older person has increased dramatically since the 1980s, and is mostly committed by a family member.

Violence against women is a serious social and health issue in the U.S. It is a leading cause of injury for American women between the ages of 15 and 44. Acts of violence against women have devastating and costly consequences for individuals, families, communities, and societies. These consequences include broken families, increased medical and mental health expenses, police and court costs, strain on the shelter and foster care system, and increased sick leave, absenteeism and non-productivity in the workplace. Physical and emotional trauma on the victims and any individuals witnessing the violence can lead to stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (an emotional state of discomfort and stress associated with the memories of a disturbing event). Victims can also experience depression and lowered self-esteem.

What causes violence against women? Is it ever the woman's fault?

Violence against women is never the woman's fault. The root causes of violence against women are extremely complicated and the subject of much research. Some of the causes identified by studies that look at why violence is committed against women include: witnessing intimate partner, or domestic violence, as a child or adolescent; experiencing violence as a child from caregivers; chronic alcohol abuse; lack of communication skills; a distorted view of male-female relationships and a need for power and control; a distorted view of manhood where violence and aggression is valued over other characteristics.

We want to emphasize, however, that there is no justification for violent behavior. Violence against women by anyone is always wrong, whether the abuser is a current or past spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend; someone you date; a family member; an acquaintance; or a stranger. You are not at fault. You did not cause the abuse to occur, and you are not responsible for the violent behavior of someone else.

If you or someone you know has been a victim of intimate partner violence or domestic violence, seek help from other family members and friends or community organizations. Make sure you and your children are SAFE. Talk with a health care provider, especially if you have been physically hurt. Reach out for support or counseling. To find help near you, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (800) 799-SAFE, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (800) 537-2238, or local telephone information for domestic violence programs and shelters in your area. The National Women's Health Information Clearinghouse (NWHIC) has provided resources and other information at the end of this FAQ.

Are some women more at risk for physical assault than others?

Violence against women does not discriminate. It affects women of all racial backgrounds, ages, and economic situations. But, research shows that some women may be more at risk for violence than others. It is estimated that between almost 10% to a little more than 20% of women in America have experienced intimate partner violence during pregnancy. Women in families with incomes under \$10,000 are more likely than women with larger incomes to be victims of violence by an intimate partner. Women 19 to 29 years of age are more likely to be victims of violence by an intimate partner. Also, women living with HIV can be at increased risk for intimate partner violence. Research has shown that HIV positive women report emotional, physical, or sexual abuse at some time after their diagnosis.

Does risk for violence against women change with age?

Violence against women can begin early as child abuse, and can occur at any age. Some women are never directly abused, while others may encounter multiple forms of abuse or violence. Age is a factor in risk for violence. Americans are now living longer than ever before and the older population is growing. As the elderly population grows, so do their needs for assistance with the daily activities of living such as eating, bathing, dressing, and getting around. Tragically, the incidence of elder abuse is also growing as the elder population grows. Between 1986 and 1996, reported cases of elder abuse increased by 150%. Elder abuse includes neglect, physical abuse, financial exploitation, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. The most common victim of elder abuse is an older woman with some chronic illness or disability, and the most common abusers are adult children, other family members, and spouses.

What is sexual assault and abuse and how common is it?

Sexual assault and abuse has become commonplace and an epidemic in the U.S. Somewhere in America, a woman is raped every 2 minutes. Research has shown that 1 in 6 women in the U.S. has experienced some form of sexual assault or abuse during their lifetime. Sexual assault includes incest, rape (by a stranger or someone you know), unwanted sexual contact, sexual harassment, forced prostitution or exposure to pornography, and voyeurism.

Isn't sexual assault usually by strangers?

No, in fact, about half of all rapes and sexual assaults against women are committed by friends and people they know. Of the women who have been sexually assaulted during their lifetimes, 76% of them over the age of 18 report that they have been raped by someone they know—a current or former husband, live-in partner, date, or boyfriend.

I've read articles about a "date rape" drug? What is it and what exactly is date rape?

Date rape is a form of dating violence that includes sexual assault, physical violence, and verbal or emotional abuse committed by someone you are dating. Dating violence occurs in both casual and serious relationships and in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Most cases of dating violence are not reported to the authorities.

Date rape drugs are pills—like the drug Rohypnol and GHB, or Gamma Hydroxybutyrate—that are often slipped into a victim's drink while a person is in a social setting such as a club or party. The victim will usually begin to feel drunk or sleepy soon after ingesting the drug. Immobilized and silenced, the victim is unable to resist, and the abuser can easily take advantage, and control, of the situation. The victim may wake up not knowing where she/he is or what has taken place. However, some signs indicate that a sexual assault may have occurred, such as being naked or having physical pain upon regaining consciousness. Because the victim cannot remember the incident, these cases are often dismissed in court. The victim is then left to deal with the trauma of the sexual assault and the uncertainty surrounding the specifics of the crime.

What is intimate partner violence (or domestic violence)?

Intimate partner violence is the most frequent type of violence committed against women. Intimate partner violence—sometimes called domestic violence—is defined as abuse that is committed by a current or past spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend. The types of abuse include actual or threatened physical and/or sexual assault, emotional abuse, or verbal abuse. These crimes occur in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Intimate partner abuse can have an extremely negative effect not just on the victim, but on other family members as well, particularly children.

Intimate partner violence is not confined to any one socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, religious, or age group. It is the leading cause of injury to women in the United States, where they are more likely to be assaulted, injured, raped, or killed by a male partner than by any other type of assailant. Accurate information on the extent of domestic violence is difficult to obtain because of extensive underreporting. However, it is estimated that as many as four million instances of domestic abuse against women occur annually in the U.S. About one-fourth of all hospital emergency room visits by women result from domestic assaults.

What counts as intimate partner violence (or domestic violence) and abuse?

Intimate partner violence, or domestic violence, and abuse may be any one or combination of the following.

- Physical abuse that is typically recurrent and escalates in both frequency and severity. Although most assaults on women do not result in death, they do result in physical injury and severe emotional distress.
- Physical injuries are the most tangible manifestations of intimate partner violence—bruises, broken bones, black eyes—yet they are not always reported by women to health care professionals and police, and often go unrecognized by these individuals who have a mandate to intervene in abuse or suspected abuse cases.
- Psychological abuse of women is underestimated, sometimes trivialized, and can be difficult to define. Psychological abuse has been reported by abused women to be as damaging as physical battering because of its impact on the self-image and self-esteem of the victim. It often precedes or accompanies physical abuse, but it may occur by itself.
- Sexual assault consists of a range of behaviors that may include pressured sex when the victim does not desire sex, coerced sex by manipulation or threat, physically forced sex, or sexual assault accompanied by violence. Victims may be forced or coerced to perform a type of sex they do not desire, or at a time they do not want it. For some victims this type of sexual violation can have profound consequences and can be difficult to discuss.
- Emotional abuse represents a method of control that may consist of verbal attacks and humiliations, including repeated verbal attacks against the victim's worth as an individual or role as a parent, family member, co-worker, friend, or community member. The verbal attacks often emphasize the victim's vulnerabilities.

- Economic abuse is when abusers control access to the all of the victims' resources, such as time, transportation, food, clothing, shelter, insurance, and money. The abuser may interfere with a person's ability to become self-sufficient, and take total control all of the finances. When the victim leaves the violent relationship, the abuser may use economics as a way to maintain control or force her or him to return.
- Isolation occurs when abusers try to control victims' time, activities, and contact with others. Abusers may accomplish this through interfering with supportive relationships, creating barriers to normal activities, such as taking away the car keys or locking the victim in the home, and lying or distorting what is real in order to gain psychological control.

My friends think I am in an abusive relationship, but I am not sure. What are the signs of intimate partner violence (or domestic violence)?

Intimate partner violence, or domestic violence, involves elements of control and the abuse of power by the person committing the violence. By using intimidation, coercion and threats, and emotional or economic abuse, these abusers exert their control over their victims. In many cases, victims are too frightened to ask for help or to report the acts of violence committed against them or their children.

A number of reasons could be given for an abuser's behavior, including economic hardship, growing up in a violent or abusive household, or abusing drugs or alcohol or both. There is no justification, however, for violent behavior. It is a very common problem and should be taken very seriously.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Have you ever been physically hurt, such as being kicked, pushed or punched, by your partner or ex-partner?
- Has your partner ever used the threat of hurting you to get you to do something?
- Has your partner tried to keep you from seeing your family, going to school, or doing other things that are important to you?
- Do you feel like you are being controlled or isolated by your partner?
- Have you ever been forced by your partner to have sex when you did not want to?
- Has your partner ever insisted on having unsafe (not using protection for sexually transmitted infections or HIV) sex?
- Is your partner very jealous and always questioning whether you are faithful?
- Does your partner regularly blame you for things that you could not control or insult you?
- Are you ever afraid of your partner or of going home? Does he/she make you feel unsafe?

Other signs of intimate partner violence, or domestic violence, that observers might see in a relative or friend include:

- Being prone to accidents.
- Injuries that could not be caused by accident, or do not match the story of what happened to cause them.
- Injuries on many different areas of the body, especially areas that are less likely to get hurt, such as the face, throat, neck, chest, abdomen, or genitals.
- Many injuries that happened at different times.
- Bruises, burns, or wounds that are shaped like objects such as teeth, hands, belts, a cigarette tip, or look like the injured person has a glove or sock on (from having a hand or foot placed in boiling water).
- Seeking medical help a lot.
- Waiting to or not seeking medical help for serious injuries.
- Depression.
- Use of alcohol or drugs.
- Suicide attempts.

A "yes" answer to any of these questions means that your relative or friend may be in an abusive relationship and should get help immediately.

It is important to understand that an abusive partner chooses to be violent and it is not the victim's fault, no matter what the abuser might say. Also remember that abuse usually becomes worse over time. There are many places you or your friend can go to receive information or help. To find help near you, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (800) 799-SAFE, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (800) 537-2238, or local telephone information for domestic violence programs and shelters in your area.

Is there a cure for intimate partner violence (or domestic violence)?

Even when abuse ends, either by repairing the situation or leaving the situation, survivors of intimate partner violence, or domestic abuse, experience a high incidence of depression, attempt suicide and have increased rates of substance abuse, chronic fatigue, anxiety, sleeping and eating disorders, and nightmares. Professional counseling is very important for survivors of intimate partner violence.

Do skills learned in self-defense workshops really do any good?

Research has shown that using self-defense measures during rape reduces the chance of a completed rape. But, those measures can also increase the risk of additional physical injury.

What should I do if someone I know is being subject to domestic violence?

If you or someone you know is affected by domestic violence, please call the confidential

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE (
Linea Nacional sobre la Violencia Domestica)
1-800-799-SAFE (7233) *** 1-800-787-3224 (TDD)

For More Information..

You can find out more information about violence against women by contacting the following organizations:

If you or a friend is experiencing intimate partner violence, or domestic violence, PLEASE CALL the confidential toll-free number.

Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE.

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#), 800-799-SAFE

[National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#), 303-839-1852

[Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Child Protection and Custody](#), 800-527-3223

[Family Violence Prevention Fund](#)

The Battered Women's Justice Project, 800-903-0111

Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 888-792-2873

Contributions to this FAQ on Domestic Violence: Magee Women's Research Hospital/ University of Pittsburgh, a National Center of Excellence in Women's Health sponsored by the Office on Women's Health in the Department of Health and Human Services.

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September 2001